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ABSTRACT

The distinction between formal and casual English as reflected in the lexicon, in phonology, and in syntax is studied. Formality is treated as separate from other categorizations of language such as geographical origin of the speaker, social class of the participants, or specific context of discourse. The study was restricted mainly to the use of two informats. A categorization of lexical entries and rules into three stylistic levels--formal, netural, and casual--is rejected as insufficiently detailed. Sentences exhibiting stylistically discordant elements are then used to get at fine distinctions in level. A more complex gradation model by which each linguistic element is assigned a value between -10 and +10 is outlined. The degree of stylistic deviance of a sentence is then calculated as the difference between the values of the most extreme elements in it. Within the framework given here, the linguist must determine which phonological and syntactic rules and lexical entries are stylistically marked and assign them values in a way that predicts the correct ordering of both elements and discords. Ways in which the more complex model could fail to be adequate are also discussed. (PP)

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Discord*

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1. Introduction

The existence of various styles, levels, or tones of spoken and written language has long been recognized, and there is now a considerable literature--much of it prescriptive--dealing with particular examples and their classification.[1] Our concern here is with the distinction between formal language and casual language,[2] as reflected in the lexicon, in phonology, and in syntax. In all of the following pairs, the (a) examples are more formal than the (b) examples:

(1) a. She was quite tall.
    b. She was pretty tall.
(2) a. I am unhappy with these avocados.
    b. I'm unhappy with these avocados.
(3) a. He won't eat fava beans.
    b. Fava beans he won't eat.

The sentences in (1) are distinguished by the choice of lexical item, the adverb quite as opposed to pretty; the sentences in (2), by the nonapplication versus application of a phonological contraction rule, auxiliary reduction; and the sentences in (3), by the nonapplication or application of the syntactic rule of topicalization (or Y-movement). Compare DeCamp 1971:352-3: 'If I shift into a formal, oratorical style, several rule-predictable things happen to my grammar: the contraction transformation is blocked, so that I say is not and he has instead of isn't and he's; the ordering of the rules for case marking and for relative attraction is reversed, so that whom appears in my surface structures; conversely an otherwise dormant rule of disjunctive pronominalization makes me sprout it is he and it is I; several phonological rules of assimilation and vowel reduction are blocked.'

Although there are complex interrelationships, we propose to discuss formality separate from other categorizations of language--for instance, categorization by geographical origin of the speaker, social class of the participants, their sex, their ages, their personal involvement in the discourse, politeness, occurrence of grammatical shibboleths or simple errors, poetic texture, or specific context of discourse. This idealization permits us to treat a wide

variety of cases within a single framework. The idealization also reflects the fact that speakers seem to be able (within limits) to make judgments about which of two examples is the more formal, about whether a single example sentence is formal or casual, and even about whether an example is extremely, fairly, or only a bit formal (or casual). Now it may turn out that this ability is not at all simple--in section 3.2 below, in fact, we consider some possible difficulties--but it seems sensible to examine less complex treatments of linguistic behavior before taking on elaborate models.

Again, compare DeCamp's statement: 'Of course the sociological correlates of the linguistic variation are multidimensional: age, education, income bracket, occupation, etc. But the linguistic variation itself is linear if described in linguistic terms rather than in terms of those sociological correlates' (1971:354).

In general, we must stress that our work is in several ways quite exploratory.

We have restricted our discussion largely to our own judgments about levels of formality and about stylistic anomaly in American English. The restriction to two informants (occasionally supplemented by others) is a matter of convenience only; we would hope to see careful studies of informant reactions on a large scale. Our reference to informant judgments rather than to properties of masses of elicited or collected data is intensional, however. Although we recognize the significance of the work of Labov and those influenced by him, we do not wish to dismiss informant judgments as sources of insight into linguistic systems.

In the next section we consider a simple account of stylistic level and observe that this account is insufficiently delicate to categorize our judgments. Sentences exhibiting stylistically discordant elements are then used to get at finer distinctions in level. A more complex gradation model is outlined in section 3.1, where a catalogue of elements is also provided, and the ways in which this model could fail to be adequate are canvassed in section 3.2. In section 3.3 we consider several cases that might illustrate one type of failure, the grammatization of instances of discord into conditions on rules.

2. A simple account

A straightforward categorization of lexical entries and rules with respect to stylistic levels would be formal, neutral (usable in all styles), casual. Using these categories, (1a) is formal, (1b) casual; (2a) formal, (2b) neutral; (3a) neutral, (3b) casual. Other examples of lexical items and rules that distinguish among the three styles are considered below.

2.1. Some examples

A (peremptory) request with if you please is formal, while the corresponding request with please is neutral:

(4) a. Give me that negative, if you please.
b. Give me that negative, please.

Interested in is neutral, but go for is casual:

(5) a. He's not interested in yoga.
b. He doesn't go for yoga.

The preposing of negative adverbials (together with subject-verb inversion) is formal, while sentences without preposing are neutral:

(6) a. Nowhere does he state the nature of the process.
b. He doesn't state the nature of the process anywhere.

A question tag with opposite polarity from its main clause (a flip tag) is neutral, but a tag with matching polarity (an alpha tag) is casual:

(7) a. She's the chairman, isn't she?
b. She's the chairman, is she?

A sentential subject is formal, but extraposition gives a neutral sentence:

(8) a. That he paid only $1800 in taxes was no surprise.
b. It was no surprise that he paid only $1800 in taxes.

The deletion of certain sentence-initial elements transforms a neutral utterance into a casual one.[3]

(9) a. Are they going with us?
b. They going with us?

The phonological process of initial glide deletion in unstressed words is suppressed in the formal (10a), but applies in the neutral (10b). Flap deletion and desyllabication give the casual (10c).

(10) It would be easier to say.
a. [It wʊd bi iziɾ tu se]
b. [Iɾəd bi iziɾ tə se]
c. [Id bi·ziɾ tə se]

2.2. Evidence that the simple analysis is inadequate

The three-way distinction, although initially attractive because of its simplicity, is insufficient for a comprehensive analysis of stylistic levels; and, in fact, most writers on the subject have seen more than two marked levels.[4] Intuitively, certain items or rules have a much more extreme effect than others; uncontracted let us in

(11) Let us go now.

is much more formal than uncontracted I am in (2a). Preposing the adverbial phrase of (12a) gives a more formal sentence, (12b), than preposing the appositive, as in (12c):

(12) a. John went back to work, somewhat ill and utterly depressed.
b. Back to work John went, somewhat ill and utterly depressed.
c. Somewhat ill and utterly depressed, John went back to work.

So plus a clause is felt by some speakers to be more casual than the same clause with an alpha tag, even though the two constructions have similar meanings and uses:

(13) a. So you're a man-hater now.
b. You're a man-hater now, are you?

In addition to judging relative levels directly, we can get at fine distinctions in stylistic level by considering cases of discord, conflict in level between elements. In what follows, we consider only discord between elements from different components of grammar; here the effects are quite striking (sometimes definitely funny), although discord within a component deserves study too. We present below a sampling of cases in which formal and casual lexical entries, syntactic rules, and phonological processes are variously juxtaposed. To indicate degrees of deviance, we have used the question mark quantitatively--that is, the more deviant the sentence is thought to be, the greater the number of question marks assigned to it (up to three). The asterisk is used to mark sentences we judge to be so far beyond the pale they are ungrammatical (though we return to these examples in later sections).

Formal lexicon, casual syntactic processes. Casual topicalization of NP conflicts with the formal lexical items in

(14) ?Men who eschew controversy we are not in need of.

Discord results when the formal impersonal one appears in casual pseudo-imperative conditionals or in a sentence with a casual tag:

(15) *Wash oneself every day, and one's skin gets dry.
(16) *One should eat violet leaves, should one?

Formal lexicon, casual phonology. Discord (in different degrees) arises in the association of formal lexical entries with the casual phonological processes that give gonna, wanna, and lemme:

(17) I submit that what they are {??going to / ??gonna} do might well discredit the program in its entirety.

(18) I {want to / ?wanna} make one thing perfectly clear.

(19) {Let me / ???Lemme} assure you of my dedication to this office.

Formal syntax, casual lexicon. Adverbial preposing conflicts with the casual entries go for and you know:

(20) ??Never did he go for rock or cool jazz, you know.

The casual impersonal pronoun they and the predicate great are discordant with a sentential subject. Compare casual (21a) and formal (21b) with the juxtaposition of styles in (21c).

(21) a. It's great they finally caught up with those hoods.
b. That the miscreants were finally apprehended is splendid.
c. ??That they finally caught up with those hoods is great.

Formal syntax, casual phonology. Casual processes of flap deletion, auxiliary reduction, and desyllabication (illustrated in (22a)) are at variance with the formal sentential subject of (22b).

(22) a. [hi dIn se Id bin izi wṛd tə se] He didn't say it would be an easy word to say.
b. ??[ðæt Id bin izi wṛd tə se dIn mæṛ] That it would be an easy word to say didn't matter.

Formal phonology, casual lexicon. Suppressing contraction renders (23) discordant.

(23) ???Let us cut out now, baby.

The sentential idioms of (24) lose their idiomatic understanding when casual phonological processes are suppressed, as in (25).

(24) a. What's up?
b. You're telling mé!
c. So's your old man!

(25) a. What is up?
b. You are telling mé!
c. So is your old man!

Formal phonology, casual syntax. The casual tag of (26) conflicts with the formal suppression of contraction.

(26) ?She is the chairman, is she?

The casual deletion in (27) conflicts with suppression of contraction.

(27) *Have not seen George around for a long time.

3.1. A more complex linear model.

Given that a three-way division is not adequate, the next possibility to explore is that there are merely more degrees of casualness and more degrees of formality, as various writers have suggested. A gradation model of this type might provide two scales deviating from the neutral, or zero, position--say, from +1 to +10 for formal elements and from -1 to -10 for casual elements (the choice of the number 10 here is without significance). Each linguistic element (lexical entry or rule) would be assigned a value between -10 and +10, and the degree of stylistic deviance of a sentence could be calculated as the difference between the values of the most extreme elements in it.[5] Thus, a sentence having a very formal element in it, one assigned the value +9, and also a fairly casual element, one with the value -5, would receive the deviance index 14, and would be predicted to be more anomalous than a sentence with the same formal element in combination with an only slightly casual (-2) element (index 11), or a sentence with the same casual element in combination with a moderately formal (+4) element (index 9).

Our gradation model is quite similar to (but distinct from) DeCamp's model. DeCamp proposes to order linguistically variable elements on a linear scale, each point on the scale separating occurrence of the element from its nonoccurrence. DeCamp does not incorporate neutral elements into his model, nor does he provide a mechanism for distinguishing larger or smaller distances between two elements (except insofar as there are intervening elements on the scale; but nothing guarantees that such intervening elements will happen to occur). On the other hand, DeCamp assumes that his scales are indefinitely divisible ('by calling it a continuum I mean that given two samples of Jamaican speech which differ substantially from one another, it is usually possible to find a third intermediate level in an additional sample' (354)), whereas the number of levels in our model is bounded by speakers' abilities in discriminating styles. This last difference between the two models points to the major distinction between DeCamp's treatment and ours: he is primarily interested in systematizing variation across speakers, while our purpose is to systematize variation across contexts for a single speaker. These are related types of variation, but not necessarily the same.

Within our framework, the linguist's problem is to determine which rules and lexical entries are stylistically marked and then to assign them values in a way that predicts both the correct ordering of elements and the correct relative ordering of discords. A first attempt at a sample of this catalogue is given in the next section.

3.1.1. Phonological rules.[6]

+10: uncontracted let us

+9: suppression of t → ɑ / __##, as in right, got, eat,

especially before word-initial consonants or in pausa; suppression of a rule that deletes morpheme-final t and d after certain continuant consonants, as in and, soft, must, especially before other consonants

+7: suppression of n → Ø / V__C, as in can't, hand; suppression of a rule syncopating vowels, roughly

$$\begin{bmatrix} V \\ -stress \end{bmatrix} \rightarrow \emptyset \;/\; C ____ R \begin{bmatrix} V \\ -stress \end{bmatrix}$$

as in hindering, pedaling, happening

+4: failure to delete initial glides h and w in unstressed words, as in his, would; suppression of auxiliary reduction; failure to reduce vn to n in in, on, an and

0: obligatory morphophonemic rules

-1: rules yielding wanna from want to

-3: rules yielding gonna from going to

-5: vowel centralization (Shockey 1973 observes a significant degree of centralization in the conversational style of her subjects); flap deletion, as in magnetic and about it

-7: desyllabication after flap deletion, as in being [biŋ], be an [bin], it'd [Id]; rules yielding lemme from let me.

Note that formality in phonology largely derives from suppressing rules rather than from applying them.[7] Also note that it is very hard to find an optional phonological rule without any stylistic import whatsoever. In these respects, phonology is different from syntax, and it would be very interesting to try to explain why.

3.1.2. Syntactic rules.[8]

+10: counterfactual inversion, as in Were John here, we could discuss your problem

+8: subject-verb inversion after preposed negative elements, as in Nowhere does he state the nature of the process

+7: pied piping in questions and relatives, as in At whom are you smiling? and The person to whom he spoke was a former dean; preposing of adverbial phrases, as in To her closest friends we related what was happening

and On your answer our future lives depend; preposing of appositive clauses, as in Feeling that he might be in danger, I ordered him to return and The largest single campus university in the U.S., Ohio State offers 250 programs of study.

+5: failure to extrapose sentential subjects, as in That the test case was disappointing surprised no one and For the test case to be disappointing surprised no one.

+3: use of existential there with verbs other than be, as in There are said to be several candidates for the job, There remained several matters to attend to.

0: passivization; flip tags, as in This dog is handsome, isn't it? and This dog won't bite, will it?; VP deletion, as in These machines can handle that job, but the new ones can't.

-2: extraposition from NP, as in A man came in who was wearing a headphones stereo; topicalization of NP, as in This paper I'm going to regret ever having begun. (Huddleston 1971:315 finds that the focusing achieved by topicalization of NP 'is effected just about exclusively' by passivization in scientific English).

-4: alpha tags, as in You're going to town, are you?; pseudo-imperative conditionals, like Add acid and the solution will turn blue; retention of pronouns in Don't you talk to me that way! and I got me a wife; left dislocation, as in That guy, he's a bum; right dislocation, as in He's a bum, that guy; emotive negative tags, as in Not this bottle, you won't!

-5: topicalization of VP, as in Call a cab I never could; emotive extraposition of NP, as in It's great the way he's handling the ball (Elliott 1971).

-9: various deletions of sentence-initial elements, illustrated by Think I'd better get this in the mail today, See where he went?, Can't be many people here, Ask me, I'd say he went that way.

3.1.3. Lexical items.[9]

+9: hereby

+8: performative formulas like I submit, let me say, I should point out, I conclude, etc.

+7: impersonal one (rather than you); eschew

+2: subsequently, in this respect/regard, in conjunction with, in the event

0: then, and, after, chair, ...

-3: intensifying pretty, really, awful; you know and similar filler items; impersonal they

-5: many slang expressions, for instance exclamatory boy!, great [good], beat it [leave], step on it [hurry up], bust [arrest], go for [be interested in]

-8: obscene expressions

We return now to the discordant example sentences of section 2.2, to see what deviance indices would be assigned to them by the scheme just outlined. The table below includes all question-marked (but not asterisked) examples:

Example number	Deviance index	Question marks
(14)	9	?
(17)	11	??
(18)	9	?
(19)	15	???
(20)	11	??
(21c)	10	??
(22b)	12	??
(23)	15	???
(26)	8	?

Our assignment of values to the elements in these sentences is consistent with our original judgments of the relative deviance of the sentences; an index of 8 or 9 corresponds to one question mark, 10 to 12 corresponds to two, and by 15 we have reached three question marks. We discuss the asterisked examples in section 3.3.

3.2. Potential difficulties

The model of stylistic level outlined above could be inadequate in a number of ways. In fact, several of these difficulties are implicit in the previous discussion. But let us take up the problems one by one.

Variation in values by environment. It might be impossible to assign invariant values to an element because the degree of formality of the element is different in different linguistic environments. In particular, it might be impossible to assign an invariant value to a rule because application of the rule to different lexical items or structures yields results not on the same stylistic level. We have already seen a few cases of this difficulty. For instance, as

noted in the previous section, existential *there* with verbs other than *be* is somewhat formal. But *there* with predicative *be* is neutral; there is nothing marked about sentences like

(28) There is a car in the driveway.

Consequently, unless it can be argued that there are two or more *there*-insertion rules, we have here an example of a rule that gives different values in different environments.

Similarly, pied piping is not a rule, but a mode of application of rules. Yet the result of moving *wh*-words in questions and relatives has different values, depending upon whether or not these rules pied pipe.

We have also pointed out that topicalization of NP is less casual than topicalization of VP. For some speakers, moreover, topicalization in negative sentences is less casual than topicalization in positive sentences, so that (29) is less casual than (30):

(29) Beans I never eat.
(30) Beans I eat often.

Other cases are easy to find. Preposing of adverbials has quite different effects depending upon what sort of adverbial is fronted. Contrast the formal sentences in 3.1.2, which have preposed negative elements and the phrases *to her closest friends* and *on your answer*, with sentences with preposed time adverbials, which are stylistically neutral:

(31) Yesterday we went to Philadelphia.
(32) At the beginning of the week they should receive the letter.

The effect of preposed negative elements isn't constant, as a matter of fact, since the *not only* construction is not particularly marked:

(33) Not only do I read Spanish, (but) I also play polo.

For syntax, it seems to be that stylistically marked elements *typically* vary in their effect according to environment. Phonological rules and lexical items don't seem to exhibit variation to this degree. We have, however, illustrated a few cases of variation within phonological rules. Presumably, the rules yielding *lemme*, *gonna*, and *wanna* are drawn from the same set, yet the three results are not on a par stylistically. And perhaps the contraction in *let's* can be argued to be part of a more general contraction process, in which case this general process would have different stylistic values in different environments. Moreover, extension of phonological processes has been widely noted by students of casual speech. Nevertheless, the syntactic cases are much more striking than the phonological ones, and there is no obvious syntactic parallel to

the paths along which phonological processes extend with increasing casualness of speech.

Complexity of the deviance function. The deviance function might be more complex than F - C, where F is the extreme formality value and C the extreme casualness value. The correct function might involve coefficients, or assign different weights to different components of grammar, or even be nonlinear. We see no indication that this is so, except in the cases discussed in section 3.3.

Range and distribution of values. The presentation of the model above claims that the most formal possible element is as marked as the most casual possible element, and provides equally spaced degrees between a neutral point and these extremes. It is not required that each component of the grammar of a language, or even each language, exhibit elements at the extremes. Moreover, it is not required that the value within some component, or the total set of values for a language, distribute themselves evenly over the range from +10 to -10. Values might cluster at (say) +10, +8, +2.5, 0, -5, and -7. Restricted ranges and skewed distributions are consistent with the model as presented. But they would indicate--especially if they recurred in many languages--that the model was insufficiently restricted. We have not surveyed a large enough body of phenomena to tell whether this problem arises.

At the moment, then, it appears that the major difficulty with the gradation model is the variability of elements according to environment. This is a very serious difficulty, and it is not easy to see how to accommodate the sorts of facts exemplified above. A brute force solution would be to mark subrules of rules for their stylistic level, and to mark, in the same way, lexical items to which rules apply--that is, to treat formality as squishy (Ross 1972) in several dimensions 'below the level of the rule'.

David Dowty has pointed out to us that our observations can be taken as leading to quite a different conclusion: since the stylistic level of transformational operations seems to be psychologically real, facts about discord can be interpreted as evidence that similar operations with different stylistic levels constitute different rules. That is, we might simply conclude that there are two or more distinct *there*-insertion rules, several adverbial preposing rules, several topicalization rules, distinct rules of *wh*-movement according to whether or not pied piping takes place, and so on. In some cases--*there*-insertion, for instance--this conclusion would not be suprising, but in others--as in the pied piping examples--it would be distasteful, since we would have to break up a number of rules in a parallel way.

3.3. Grammatized discord

The examples in (24) and (25) of section 2.2 illustrate a specialized form of deviation from the simple gradation model: the combination of a casual lexical item (in each case a sentential idiom) with formal phonology (failure to contract auxiliaries) is simply

impossible. Apparently, the English sentential idioms What's up, You're telling mé, and So's your old man must either be marked as obligatorily undergoing deletion of the vowels in is and are, or lack these vowels in their phonological underlying representations. Note that degree of discord by itself is not sufficient to explain our judgments; on the assumption that the sentential idioms are simply slang, or just a bit more casual than the slang expressions listed in section 3.1.3, the deviance index for (25) is only 9 to 11.

In (27) above, we saw a similar example, this time involving a syntactic deletion rule in combination with the suppression of contraction. Apparently, contraction is obligatory in certain reduced sentences. Again, the deviance index for (27) is 13, which is less than the index for (19) and (23).

Sentence (15) (similarly (16)) illustrates an interaction between a syntactic rule and the formality of the lexical item one. The syntactic rule in question is one that forms imperative-looking sentences from conditional remote structures. The source of (15) would be the grammatical

(34) If one washes oneself every day, one's skin gets dry.

parallel to the derivation of

(35) Wash yourself every day, and your skin gets dry.

from

(36) If you wash yourself every day, your skin gets dry.

(understood with the impersonal you). Apparently, this rule of pseudo-imperative conditional formation must require the subject you in the antecedent of the conditional; antecedents with one in them cannot undergo the rule, even though there is no semantic anomaly. Although the deviance index for (15) is only 11, we suggest that the explanation for the restriction on the rule is the stylistic discord between the rule and the lexical item one. Like some of the perceptual constraints studied by Grosu 1972, the condition has become grammatized, made absolute rather than graded. Grosu notes that different languages grammatize different constraints--English, for instance, has grammatized a constraint against complex prenominal modifiers, while German has not. Similarly, we would not be surprised to find other languages in which the translations of (15) and (16) were merely somewhat odd.

We conclude that the most attractive accounts of stylistic level are inadequate in several ways. Apparently, what is called for is a descriptive device of at least the complexity of subrule hierarchies (or the partition of standard rules into many rules each), plus the postulation of conditions on rules which are motivated by stylistic discord but are categorical.

Footnotes

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1. Traditional discussions of usage--the surveys by Fowler, Gowers, Partridge, and the Evanses, for instance--tend to concentrate on lexical choices, and their judgments of stylistic levels are not clearly distinguished from judgments about grammaticality, clarity, beauty, regional or arelaistic character, and other matters. Technical linguistic discussions have concentrated on phonology (as in Dressler 1972 and Zwicky 1972b) or on correlations between linguistic and sociolinguistic variables.

2. To classify styles we use the terms formal and casual where Labov 1966 uses careful and casual, respectively (he reserves formal and informal to characterize contexts, noting that styles and contexts are correlated but not coextensive).

3. See Schmerling 1973 for a discussion of subjectless sentences. Schmerling 582 notes that 'some elusive element of spontaneity and impulsiveness' is involved in uttering sentences like Guess I should be going.

4. Thus, Labov's studies see five or more stylistic levels, ranging from casual speech to the reading of minimal pairs, and Fouché 1959, treating liaison in French, distinguishes two styles (labeled conversation sérieuse et soignée and style soutenu) more elevated than a basic style (conversation courante).

5. This proposal has something of the flavor of Ross' 1964 treatment of degrees of grammaticality for superlative constructions. In addition to rules which have no effect on grammaticality, there are rules whose application is said to raise or lower grammaticality by a specified number of degrees.

6. These examples are drawn from various sources, in particular Zwicky 1972a.

7. Lawrence Schourup has pointed out to us that contracted mightn't and shan't are more formal than uncontracted might not and shall not.

8. The examples are taken from various sources, in particular Ross 1967.

9. Wells 1960 observes a general preference for nominal forms in formal style, where verbal expressions would be used at a non-formal level. He contrasts at the time of our arrival with when we arrive/arrived, in the event of his doing that with if he does that.

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